

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Eugene de Mazenod

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: May 21

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IN BRIEF

Saint Eugene de Mazenod

Priest from Provence, founder of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate and bishop of Marseille from 1837 to 1861.

Feast day	May 21
Born	August 1, 1782, Aix-en-Provence, France
Died	May 21, 1861, Marseille, France
Canonized	December 3, 1995, by Pope John Paul II
Era	19th century

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Novena to Saint Eugene de Mazenod

La Major Cathedral in Marseille, Tomb of Saint Eugene de Mazenod

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Eugene de Mazenod

Saint Eugene de Mazenod was a French priest from Provence, born in Aix-en-Provence on August 1, 1782, and died in Marseille on May 21, 1861. In 1816 he founded the Missionaries of Provence, who became the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, and he served as bishop of Marseille from 1837 until his death. His missionaries carried the Gospel to Canada, the United States, Africa and Asia. Canonized in 1995 by Pope John Paul II, he is celebrated on May 21.

Who was Saint Eugene de Mazenod?

Charles Joseph Eugène de Mazenod was born into a family of the legal nobility of Provence. His father and grandfather presided over the Court of Accounts of Provence, and his mother, Marie Rose Eugénie Joannis, came from a family of physicians. As soon as the first troubles of the French Revolution broke out, the family had to flee. They took refuge in Nice, then in Turin, where Eugene went to school, then in Venice, Naples and finally Palermo.

Those years of exile were marked by poverty and loneliness. His mother returned to France to try to recover the family property, and the boy grew up far from her. In Venice, a priest, Don Bartolo Zinelli, made it possible for him to continue his studies and awakened his vocation. Nearly fifty years later, seeing Venice again, Eugene wrote: "Blessed Zinelli, what would have become of me without you?"

Key dates

- **August 1, 1782**: Born in Aix-en-Provence.
- **From 1790**: The family goes into exile in Italy.
- **1802**: Returns to France.
- **October 12, 1808**: Enters the Seminary of Saint-Sulpice in Paris.

- **December 21, 1811**: Ordained a priest in Amiens.
- **January 25, 1816**: Founds the Missionaries of Provence in Aix.
- **1826**: Approval by Pope Leo XII; the society becomes the Oblates of Mary Immaculate.
- **1837**: Becomes bishop of Marseille.
- **1841**: The first Oblates are sent to Canada.
- **September 11, 1853**: Lays the first stone of Notre-Dame de la Garde.
- **May 21, 1861**: Dies in Marseille.
- **December 3, 1995**: Canonized by Pope John Paul II.

A seminarian who stood with the pope

Back in France in 1802, Eugene hesitated for a long time over his vocation and even considered marriage. In 1808 he entered the Seminary of Saint-Sulpice in Paris. At that time Napoleon was holding Pope Pius VII captive. Eugene acted as a go-between for the superior of Saint-Sulpice, Father Émery, and the cardinals who remained loyal to the pope.

He refused to be ordained by Cardinal Maury, whom the emperor had imposed without the pope's consent, and received ordination on December 21, 1811, from the bishop of Amiens. He then turned down the post of vicar general, because he wanted to give himself to the poor.

Missionary to the poor of Provence

Returning to Provence in 1812, he preached to the poor in their own language, Provençal. In 1814 he cared for prisoners of war sick with typhus in the prisons of Aix, caught the disease himself and nearly died. On January 25, 1816, together with a few priests, he founded the Missionaries of Provence, who settled in the former Carmelite convent of Aix.

They preached more than forty parish missions, visited families in their homes, heard confessions and taught the basics of the faith, in a region where Christian life had been shaken by twenty-five years of upheaval. In 1826 Eugene obtained the approval of Pope Leo XII in Rome, and the society became the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

Bishop of Marseille

In 1823 his uncle, Fortuné de Mazenod, became bishop of Marseille and made Eugene his vicar general. Eugene was consecrated bishop in Rome in 1832 and succeeded his uncle in the see of Marseille in 1837. During his years as bishop the city grew enormously. He created twenty-one parishes and had thirty-four churches built.

He also launched two huge building projects: the new Cathedral of La Major and the Basilica of Notre-Dame de la Garde, the hilltop shrine of Our Lady that watches over the port, whose first stone he laid on September 11, 1853.

The Oblates go out to the world

Eugene remained superior of the Oblates while he was bishop. In 1841 he welcomed the bishop of Montreal, Ignace Bourget, who was looking for missionaries, and six Oblates left for Canada. This was the beginning of a vast missionary expansion, to the United States, Africa and Ceylon (today Sri Lanka). Today the Oblates are well known throughout the English-speaking world, from Canada and the United States to South Africa, Sri Lanka and the Philippines.

His last days

He fell ill early in 1861. In his last days he said: "I want to die knowing that I am dying!" By then the senior bishop of France, he died on May 21, 1861. He rests in the Cathedral of La Major in Marseille.

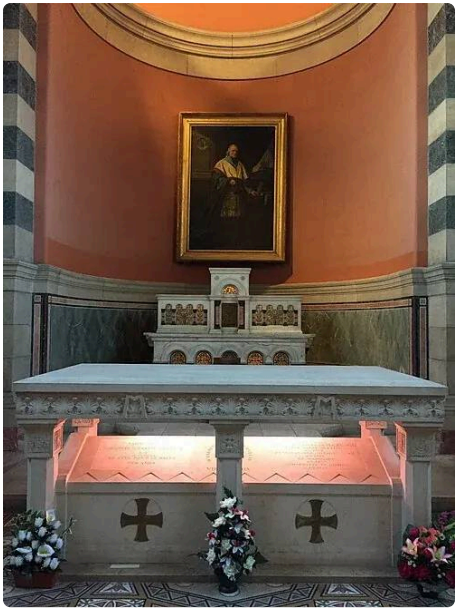
What is Saint Eugene de Mazenod known for?

Eugene de Mazenod is not tied to one traditional patronage. He is above all honored as the founder of the Oblates and as a model for missionaries, priests and bishops. He wanted to reach the people the Church no longer touched: the poor of the Provençal countryside, prisoners, then the most distant peoples. He joined missionary zeal, a deep love for the Church and a great devotion to Mary. His motto, taken from the Gospel, was: "He has sent me to preach the Gospel to the poor." People pray to him for the missions, for priests and for the most neglected.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Eugene de Mazenod in art

As a nineteenth-century saint, Eugene de Mazenod is known from portraits rather than from symbolic images. He is usually shown:

- **In a bishop's dress**, with the pectoral cross, as bishop of Marseille.
- **With the Oblate cross**, the missionary crucifix that the Oblates wear, recalling the congregation he founded.
- **Near Notre-Dame de la Garde** or the sea, recalling Marseille and the missionaries who set sail from there.



The tomb of Saint Eugene de Mazenod in the Cathedral of La Major.

To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint Eugene de Mazenod and the novena to Saint Eugene de Mazenod.

Where to pray to Saint Eugene de Mazenod

- **Marseille, France**: the Cathedral of La Major, where his tomb is found in the axial chapel.
- **Marseille, France**: the Basilica of Notre-Dame de la Garde, whose construction he began.
- **Aix-en-Provence, France**: the Oblate chapel, cradle of the Missionaries of Provence.
- **Oblate parishes and houses** around the world, where his feast is kept with special joy on May 21.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Eugene de Mazenod for the Missions and the Poor

The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate pray to their founder with texts of their own, and Saint Eugene de Mazenod left many letters and meditations. Saintspedia offers here an original prayer inspired by his life: the young exile, the missionary to the poor of Provence, the bishop of Marseille and the founder of a congregation now present throughout the world.

A missionary saint of the poor

Eugene de Mazenod chose as his motto a word of Jesus: "He has sent me to preach the Gospel to the poor." He preached in Provençal in the villages, cared for prisoners sick with typhus, and then sent his Oblates to the ends of the earth under the protection of Mary Immaculate.

Prayer to Saint Eugene de Mazenod

Saint Eugene de Mazenod, you knew exile and poverty in your youth: I entrust to you refugees, uprooted children and all who have lost their homeland.

You spoke to the poor in their own language: teach me to meet each person where they are, with simplicity and respect.

You risked your life at the bedside of sick prisoners: give me the courage to visit those whom others forget.

You sent your missionaries to the ends of the earth: pray for the Oblates, for all missionaries and for the young Churches. I also entrust to you my own intention: (name it in silence).

With Mary Immaculate, whom you loved so much, obtain for us a burning heart to proclaim Christ to the poorest. Amen.

This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia, free to use for personal and community prayer.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Eugene de Mazenod is celebrated on May 21, the day of his death in 1861. You can also pray to him:

- on January 25, anniversary of the founding of his missionaries in 1816;
- for the missions, for missionaries and for vocations to the priesthood and religious life;
- for refugees, prisoners and the poorest;
- when you visit an Oblate parish, school or shrine.

To pray with him over nine days, follow the novena to Saint Eugene de Mazenod. To know him better, read the life of Saint Eugene de Mazenod.

A prayer in his own words

Eugene's motto can itself become a short prayer, to be repeated during the day:

> *Lord, you have sent me to bring the Good News to the poor. Make me faithful to this mission, with Mary Immaculate. Amen.*

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Eugene de Mazenod

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Eugene de Mazenod, founder of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate and bishop of Marseille. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, May 21, begin it on May 13. You can also pray it at any time for the missions, for priests, for refugees or for a personal intention.

How to pray this novena

Each day, place your intention before God, read the short meditation, then say the prayer of the day followed by an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. The small act suggested for the day helps you live in Eugene's missionary spirit. You can pray it alone, as a family, with a parish group or in an Oblate community.

Day 1: A childhood in exile

When Eugene was a boy, the Revolution forced his family to flee to Italy. He knew poverty, uprooting and long separation from his mother. God did not waste those years: they prepared a heart able to understand the poor and the displaced.

Prayer: Saint Eugene, you knew exile: pray for refugees and for all children who grow up far from home.

Today: Pray for a family that has had to leave its country, or support an organization that helps refugees.

Day 2: A priest who changed a life

In Venice, Don Bartolo Zinelli took the young exile under his care, helped him study and awakened his vocation. Decades later Eugene still thanked him: "Blessed Zinelli, what would have become of me without you?" One faithful priest can change the course of a life.

Prayer: Lord, bless the priests and teachers who have guided me, and make me a guide for others.

Today: Thank, in person or in prayer, someone who helped you grow in faith.

Day 3: The long road of a vocation

Back in France, Eugene hesitated for years and even thought of marriage before entering the seminary in 1808. God is patient with our hesitations. He waits for our free answer.

Prayer: Lord, help me to hear your call in my life and to answer it generously.

Today: Pray for young people discerning their vocation.

Day 4: Faithful to the pope

As a seminarian, while Napoleon held Pope Pius VII captive, Eugene quietly served the cardinals who remained loyal to the pope. He refused to be ordained by a cardinal imposed by the emperor. Love for the Church sometimes asks for courage.

Prayer: Lord, keep me faithful to your Church, and protect the pope and the bishops in their mission.

Today: Pray for the pope and for your bishop by name.

Day 5: Speaking the language of the poor

Eugene preached to the poor of Provence in Provençal, the language they spoke at home. He did not wait for them to come to him; he went to them. The Gospel reaches hearts when it is spoken in words people understand.

Prayer: Saint Eugene, teach me to speak of God simply, in words that touch the people around me.

Today: Share a word of faith or hope with someone in a simple, natural way.

Day 6: At the bedside of prisoners

In 1814 Eugene cared for prisoners of war sick with typhus, caught the disease and nearly died. He accepted the risk because Christ is present in the prisoner and the sick.

Prayer: Lord, through the prayers of Saint Eugene, comfort prisoners, the sick and all who care for them.

Today: Pray for prisoners and prison chaplains, or visit someone who is sick.

Day 7: Missionaries together

On January 25, 1816, Eugene gathered a few priests to form the Missionaries of Provence. They preached missions, visited homes and taught the faith. He knew that mission is never a solitary work but the work of a community.

Prayer: Lord, bless the Oblates of Mary Immaculate and all missionary communities, and send workers into your harvest.

Today: Pray for vocations, or offer a gift to support missionaries.

Day 8: A shepherd for a growing city

As bishop of Marseille, Eugene created new parishes, built churches and began the shrine of Notre-Dame de la Garde above the port. He wanted no one in his growing city to be without a church or a pastor.

Prayer: Holy Mary, Our Lady of the Guard, watch over our cities, our parishes and all who travel by sea.

Today: Do something concrete for your parish: a service, a visit or a gift.

Day 9: To the ends of the earth

From 1841 Eugene sent his Oblates to Canada, then to the United States, Africa and Ceylon. On his deathbed he wanted to die "knowing that I am dying," fully conscious and offered to God. His whole life was a mission, to the very end.

Prayer: Saint Eugene, obtain for me a burning heart to proclaim Christ to the poorest, wherever I am sent.

Today: Pray for the young Churches of Africa and Asia, and for one missionary you know.

Closing prayer

Saint Eugene de Mazenod, exile in your youth, missionary to the poor, shepherd of Marseille and founder of the Oblates, you lived for one purpose: to bring the Good News to those who most needed it. Pray for missionaries, priests, refugees and prisoners. Teach us to love the Church and to trust in Mary Immaculate. Present to the Lord the intention I have carried during these nine days, and obtain for me the grace to share my faith with joy. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PILGRIMAGE

La Major Cathedral in Marseille, Tomb of Saint Eugene de Mazenod

Facing the sea, above the port of La Joliette, the Cathedral of Sainte-Marie-Majeure in Marseille, known as "La Major," is one of the largest cathedrals built in France in the 19th century. Saint Eugene de Mazenod, Bishop of Marseille from 1837 to 1861, saw its construction begin. His tomb is in the axial chapel of the building.

A cathedral for a booming city

During Eugene de Mazenod's episcopate, the population of Marseille nearly doubled. The old cathedral became too small. The bishop would have liked to build the new one on another site, but the city decided to keep it next to the old one, a decision confirmed by a decree of September 25, 1852. Work began in the following years and continued until the end of the century.

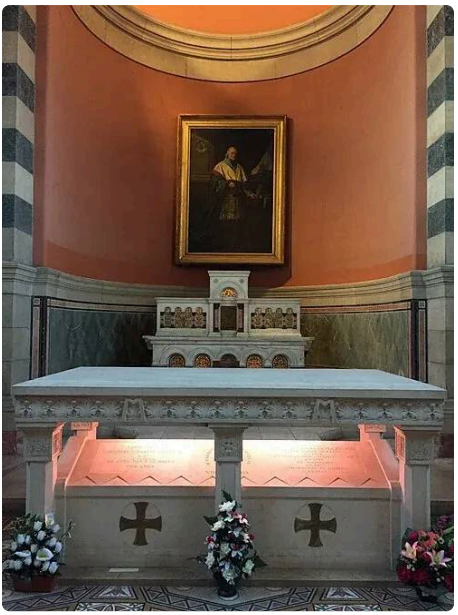
Romanesque-Byzantine architecture

La Major stands out for its Romanesque-Byzantine style, its domes, and its facades striped with alternating colored stones, light and green. Beside it survives part of the old Romanesque cathedral, called the "Old Major." Together they overlook the port and, with Notre-Dame de la Garde, form one of the most recognizable silhouettes of Marseille.

The tomb of Saint Eugene

Eugene de Mazenod rests in the axial chapel of the cathedral, at the east end of the building, where a painting depicts him. The faithful of Marseille and members of the Oblate family from around the world come here to pray to the

founder of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate and to the bishop who did so much for his city.



The tomb of Saint Eugene de Mazenod at La Major.

Praying at La Major

Before you come, you may reread the life of Saint Eugene de Mazenod. Before his tomb, a time of prayer lets you entrust to him the missions, priests, refugees, and the poorest. The prayer to Saint Eugene de Mazenod can accompany this moment. The visit can be extended to Notre-Dame de la Garde, whose first stone he laid in 1853. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Practical information

La Major Cathedral is on the Esplanade de la Major, in the 2nd arrondissement of Marseille, between the Old Port and the La Joliette district, not far from the Mucem. It is reachable on foot from the Old Port or Le Panier. Opening hours and Mass times may vary: inquire on site or with the Diocese of Marseille before you come.

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